

Providing Services for Missouri’s Gifted Learners during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Prepared by the Advisory Council on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children

As school districts are planning for a reopening after the COVID-19 closures, school systems should make substantial efforts to provide services for gifted learners in a similar manner as previous school years. When necessary, program models and delivery systems may be modified so long as state guidelines for the providing of services to gifted students continue to be implemented.

Topic	Guidance	Considerations
The ongoing need for gifted education	Gifted students need services provided by well-trained teachers, who challenge and support them, both academically and emotionally, in order to fully develop their gifts and talents.	The needs of gifted students, just as those of any other students with a special need, must still be met regardless of the format school may take. The myth that “gifted students will do fine on their own” is not supported by research.
Program models	Gifted education programming in Missouri focuses on four models: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RRT or Resource Room Teachers - a pull out program within a school or at a center; students meet with the teacher 150 minutes or more a week • SCT or Special Class Teachers - students attend a gifted education class as part of their daily schedule; students attend class 150 minutes or more a week • GRT or Gifted Resource Teacher - a model for grades 9-12 in which the teacher is a resource to high school students and faculty; teacher is in the high school 150 minutes a week • PEGS - a full time gifted program for exceptionally gifted learners 	<p>The gifted education program models are not changing during the COVID-19 health crisis. We recommend that school systems make a substantial effort to provide services for gifted learners in a similar manner as previous school years, adhering to all applicable state guidelines.</p> <p>If modifications to service models are necessary in the 2020-21 school year, school systems should plan to reimplement services for gifted learners as they were in previous school years as soon as possible.</p> <p>In addition to the time that students attend the gifted program, many school systems provide additional services to meet the academic, emotional, and social needs of gifted students.</p> <p>To learn more about the gifted education models please refer to <i>the Gifted Education Program Guidelines</i>. To learn more about the Levels of Services model, please refer to the <i>Recommendations for Providing Levels of Services for Gifted and Advanced Students</i>.</p>

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<p>Gifted education centers</p>	<p>We encourage school systems to make a substantial effort to provide services for gifted learners in a similar manner as previous school years. If the school system had been providing services through a pull-out center model, it is worthwhile to spend time and effort to continue providing services at a center. The center model can be organized, as with any other school building, to meet the needs of gifted learners while providing a healthy and safe environment.</p>	<p>Within the center environment, the number of contacts can be minimized. The center can follow the guidelines suggested for all schools, including staggered arrival and dismissal times, social distancing on the school bus, and social distancing in the classrooms.</p> <p>Adjustments to maintain services while increasing safety could be, but are not limited to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • students attend every other week or for half days to reduce class sizes; • student can remain in classes with only students from the same school; • sanitize materials and surfaces in between groups of students; • change permission forms to reflect alternate schedule and safety protocols; • propose budget for equipment and cleaning supplies needed to accommodate additional sets of materials and/or new cleaning protocols; and/or • delay transportation to the center by a couple of weeks into the school year. <p>If modifications to service models are necessary in the 2020-21 school year, school systems should plan to reimplement services for gifted learners as they were in previous school years as soon as possible.</p>
<p>Traveling Teachers</p>	<p>Gifted students need</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • curriculum that will challenge them; • appropriate enrichment; • accelerated learning opportunities; and • appropriate social and emotional support. <p>In many school systems, one or two traveling gifted education specialists provide these services to gifted learners K-12.</p>	<p>Teachers traveling between multiple buildings during the school day is not recommended, although it may be unavoidable. A traveling teacher will come in contact with more people in one day as they travel between school buildings. Careful consideration of the gifted educator's schedule is vital to increase health safety. Ideas include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rearranging the specialist's schedule to be at one building for an entire day rather than traveling between buildings mid-day; • providing more travel time so that the educator can sanitize materials and wash hands before leaving one building and

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Traveling Teachers (con't)	If this choice is made, it is important to carefully plan how the gifted education specialist will provide safe and appropriate services at multiple buildings.	<p>immediately wash hands upon arrival at the next building;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing a dedicated teaching space for the gifted specialist to minimize walking in and out of other teachers' classrooms; • identifying a key point of contact at each school to limit interactions between educators; and/or • purchasing duplicate materials so that each building has its own set of materials.
Importance of social and emotional learning (SEL)	<p>It is important for the gifted program to develop a plan for addressing the SEL needs of gifted students.</p> <p>If the district is developing a plan for SEL curriculum district-wide, it is important to have a gifted educator and/or administrator on the curriculum team.</p>	<p>Some gifted students may exhibit intense feelings when fearing for their own family, or when empathizing with others. Emotions and sensitivities can quickly spiral to worst-case scenarios if they are not addressed by knowledgeable staff.</p> <p>In their guidance on <i>Supporting Your Gifted Child During COVID-19</i>, NAGC provides crucial recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adults do not minimize students' concerns • Use cognitive (thinking) strategies • Focus on what the student can control • Practice mindfulness and breathing exercises • Find ways for the student to make a difference
Distance learning	School systems are developing distance learning plans. It is essential that gifted educators develop distance learning plans with curriculum appropriate for gifted learners.	<p>Gifted programs and teachers should participate in instructional activities that directly support the program goals and objectives of the gifted program.</p> <p>It is not appropriate for gifted education specialists to be removed from teaching gifted students to be placed into other positions during distance learning.</p>
Reassigning teachers	Gifted education specialists have advanced certifications and specific training in meeting the needs of gifted children and youth. Missouri has a shortage of gifted certified teachers.	<p>Gifted programs and teachers should participate in instructional activities that directly support the program goals and objectives of the gifted program.</p> <p>It is not appropriate for gifted education specialists to be removed from teaching gifted</p>

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		<p>students to be placed into other classroom positions.</p> <p>If modifications to service models are necessary in the 2020-21 school year, school systems should plan to reimplement services for gifted learners as they were in previous school years as soon as possible.</p>
<p>Evaluation and assessment</p>	<p>Identification of gifted learners is a priority for the beginning of the 2020-21 school year if identification was interrupted in the spring of 2020 due to the pandemic. Group testing can be conducted following guidelines the school systems provide for safe classroom assignments. Individual testing can be conducted safely using social distancing and additional safety guidelines. Individual evaluations are more reliable and valid and should be conducted, whenever possible.</p>	<p>Individual testing can be completed using carefully designed safety measures and clearly communicating safety protocols to educators, students, and their families. In accordance with county health department guidelines, it is advised examiners make modifications, such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stagger schedules to minimize student interactions; • sanitize testing materials between students; • place a sneeze guard between examiner and examinee; • wear see-through masks; • provide a freshly sharpened pencil for each student to use and take home; and • use a pointer to indicate items on a booklet. <p>With careful planning, assessments can be completed safely and with validity. For more information on the equitable identification of gifted students, please read <u>Identifying and Serving Traditionally Underrepresented Gifted Students</u>.</p>